

## **SEARCHING FOR LIEUTENANT BREVIK**

*US Analysts, Russian Army Officers, Japanese Veterans, Volunteers,  
and Russian Newspaper "Izvestiya" Keep Searching for Lt. Brevik*

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The story of the search for Lt. Brevik remains unfinished. We do not know when the search will be over. However, we do want to believe that this story will end with a very spectacular finale. Mysterious coincidences and unexpected details surface one after another, as if fate itself is giving us a sign to wait just a bit longer.

### **LIBERATORS ATTACK**

As the reader may remember, *Izvestiya* has already told about this search in its first article on the subject.

The B-24 Liberator aircraft of 2<sup>nd</sup> (which is "junior" according to the Russian military rank system) Lieutenant Richard S. Brevik was shot down over the sea on June 16, 1945, during an attack on a group of Japanese ships near Paramushir Island. The badly wounded Brevik and Corporal William Cavanaugh managed to make it to an inflated life raft. Brevik died the following morning, and Cavanaugh was drifting in the open sea for three more days, until sailors from a Japanese destroyer noticed the raft. Corporal Cavanaugh and the body of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Brevik were taken aboard and brought to the Kataoka Naval Base on Shumshu Island, which is at the most northern end of the Kuriles. After interrogation, Cavanaugh was sent to a POW camp, while Lieutenant Brevik was buried at the naval base.

On August 18, 1945, Shumshu was taken by Soviet troops. Since that time, the island was considered Soviet (now Russian) territory. So it turned out that the lieutenant's body is now buried in the Russian soil.

### **KAVANO HELPS CAVANAUGH**

On the same day when the Japanese were burying Brevik, his son was born somewhere far away, back at home in the peaceful United States. We may consider this as the first mysterious coincidence.

In the early 90s, Mr. Brevik Jr., as a voter and a taxpayer, turned to the US authorities, saying that his father deserved to be reburied with due honors as a hero who died for America. By that time, the Joint US-Russian Commission on POW/MIAs, formed by the presidents of our countries, was already in place. One of its tasks is searching for the remains of US and Soviet soldiers killed during WWII, and other international conflicts involving the two superpowers. Mr. Brevik Jr.'s inquiry reached Senator Bob Smith - co-chairman in one of the Commission's workgroups. The name of the analyst who was given the task to work on the Brevik case was Bob Smith as well. So the first thing done by Bob Smith the Analyst was retrieving from the archives the old report provided by Corporal Cavanaugh. (Upon his return from Japanese captivity, Cavanaugh submitted a detailed report about his ordeal.) Cavanaugh's report needed to be supplemented by evidence provided by the former Japanese soldiers and officers who served at the Kataoka Naval Base. It turned out that the name of the Japanese Self-defense Forces National Academy employee who collected this data is Kawano, Mr. Hitoshi Kawano. Cavanaugh and Kawano. Fate is playing with rhymes.

So, Kawano the Japanese obtained information supplementing the one received from Cavanaugh the American. Of all the documents contained in the package received from Tokyo, the most important were the materials provided by Shinyo Fukuna, the interpreter who interrogated the corporal in 1945. According to him, "the burial site is most probably located in the cemetery near the Pioneers' Monument." (The Pioneers' Monument is an obelisk built in memory of the Japanese soldiers and sailors who were exploring Shumshu Island at the end of the XIX century.) This was promising.

Materials of the aerial photography of the Kataoka Naval Base done by US Air Force planes on August 7, 1945, were retrieved from the Intelligence Archives of the US Department of Defense. It is obvious that the photographers' prime target was the Japanese line of defense, but who knows what else could get into the picture... Indeed, one of the photographs showed an area that could be a cemetery (as well as something else, since the borders were unclear, with lots of blurry spots and glare marks.) However, if this indeed was a cemetery, there is a spot that looks lighter than the others on the photo. Here is the logic of the researchers' argument: the Japanese would not have buried Brevik anywhere, like a dog; it is known that they treated the body with respect. However, they would not have buried him together with their own people, since he was an enemy. If this is true, it is possible that they dug the grave slightly aside of the cemetery. Then the lighter area represents a spot not yet covered with grass after a recent burial. The approximate location of this site is 50°39'47"77.8"N and 156°12'02"62.6"E. The expedition that flew out to Shumshu included: on the US side - joint commission (JCSD) analysts James Shonborn, Bob Smith, Ralf McCall and an expert from the US Army Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii (CILHI), as well as joint commission's

deputy co-chairman Konstantin Golumbovskiy and commission specialist Natalya Levina on the Russian side.

It turned out that the site whose location was established through calculations and the area mentioned by the Japanese veterans stood twenty-five kilometers from each other. Obviously there was an error.

Probably, the expedition could dig exploring holes near the cemetery border. However, this would mean conducting a large-scale work without any guaranty of success. Also, there is an ethical issue of how Japan would react to Russians and Americans digging up the place where its former citizens and national heroes are buried. (As the reader may remember, the monument was erected in memory of those who pioneered these lands.)

When the US-Russian expedition was flying out to Shumshu, Izvestiya published an article about the search for Lt. Brevik. After that, one day a phone buzzed in the editorial office, and a person who introduced himself as Valeriy Vasiliyevich Goncharenko said that he was ready to help the commission.

## **MINESWEEPER “MADE IN USA”**

Here the story takes an unexpected twist, and a person who remembers the postwar Shumshu comes on stage. There are very few such witnesses now, since the majority of the island population died on the night of November 4-5, 1952, when a huge tsunami hit the island.

Mr. Goncharenko's father served there in the position the Soviet naval base commander. The place known previously as Kataoka became a Russian village called Baykovo. When the Russians started settling on the island they were surprised that the local Koreans and Ainu people were building their houses mostly on hilltops. The Russians were building their solid houses in the valleys and on the seashore.

The tsunami was tearing the Russian houses off their foundations, and the houses were floating among the waves. And there were not only houses: even Japanese tanks entrenched near the pier were torn out of the ground and scattered all over the island. Then it turned out that the Goncharenkos were the only family, which by some miracle had not lost any of its members. They left the island on a Soviet Navy minesweeper that had been received by the Soviets under the Lend-Lease Act. Little Valera remembered a copper plate on the pipe: there were several lines in English, one of them saying “Made in USA.”

Then Valery Goncharenko became a submariner to spend many long years in the Soviet Navy. It is fairly obvious *which* country he considered the potential enemy. However, he

has never forgotten that a “Made in US A” ship saved his life once. This is why he decided that, with the Brevik story, his life was sort of going full circle. But how could he help the comission?

## **GRAVESTONES WITH JAPANESE CHARACTERS**

The answer was quite simple. Together with other Baykovo village kids, Valera used to run around the area, getting into the territory of the Japanese cemetery sometimes. He remembers some gravestones with inscriptions made in Japanese characters. These gravestones were located aside from the rest. Could Lt. Brevik be buried under one of them?

This seems unlikely. During wartime, no one would put gravestones on the graves of enemy soldiers. This counter-argument was expressed later at the US Embassy in Moscow, where the Brevik case workgroup was summing up the results of the expedition. In addition to the expedition participants, there were Colonel Nikolay Nikiforov of the Russian Military History Institute; Mr. Yuri Boguslavsky, Chief of the Moscow office, Joint Commission Support Directorate; Mr. Valeriy Goncharenko; and the author of this article. During this lengthy discussion, a large variety of issues were covered and analyzed. For instance, some of the questions discussed were as follows: what was the depth resolution of the photo cameras used by US air intelligence in 1945? How did the Shumshu landscape change after the tsunami? What procedures were used for the registration of Japanese POWs in Russian camps? Was their place of service specified in prison documents?

Mr. Konstantin Viktorovich Golumbovskiy, the Joint Commission’s deputy co-chairman, describes the current status of the case as follows: As of now, the commission still does not have absolutely reliable information on the exact location of the Brevik’s grave. (Although, it is most probable that Lt. Brevik was buried near the cemetery indeed.) It would be ideal, if the commission finds the witnesses of that burial, but this is unlikely. At the same time, there are many circumstances that prevent from considering this search completed. It might be reasonable to resume the search at US air intelligence archives, since it’s possible that some additional aerial photography materials have been preserved. The “Japanese lead” should be worked on again. The Kataoka Naval Base represented a major defense facility, which was under command of high-ranking officers. So it is quite possible that these people wrote memoirs or made some personal notes on their experiences when they got old. Generally, Japanese military archives are not really eager to open their doors for researchers... It might be useful to ask the Japanese side about its opinion on the possible excavations. Please note that the soil on the island is very hard to dig and stony, so the remains most probably have not been washed out of the grave by ground water. The island is uninhabited now, and there are only lighthouse service teams working shifts, so there is no one to disturb the graves. Brevik is somewhere out there - no doubt. And as soon as any new - and at least slightly trustworthy information surfaces, the search will resume.

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“It’s not important how much it costs,” Ralph McCall told me. “It is our duty to find him.”

Yuri Boguslavsky confirmed that the United States attaches a lot of importance to these issues. I recollected how they were saving Pvt. Ryan in Spielberg’s movie and Pvt. Jessica Lynch in real life. So, he is right – the US is probably very serious about that indeed.

It looks like he was a good guy, this Richard S. Brevik. He went to war, leaving a pregnant wife at home. He flew his plane right at a Japanese anti-aircraft artillery. According to Corporal Cavanaugh, Brevik - before his death - repeated the phrase “We’ve hit them good”, referring to the Japanese ship they had attacked. Honestly, this second lieutenant deserves a burial in Arlington Cemetery, in a coffin covered with Stars and Stripes, and with solemn gun salvos. At the same time, I keep thinking how many of our boys still remain unburied in Belarus forests, Volkhov swamps, or Ukrainian steppe. They were no worse than Brevik. However, it is not likely that someone will go through archives, interview veterans, or analyze decades-old air intelligence data in order to locate the remains of some “Sergei who lived on Malaya Bronnaya street.” Who is to blame for that? There is no one to blame, really. It is just the way it is... But, when I think of that, I only want to grit my teeth and... keep helping the Americans in their search for Lieutenant Brevik.